Out in the West Texas Town of El Paso

by Annabeth Balance

Editor's note: Helen was three years old when her parents divorced and her mother took the three children to El Paso, Texas. For the most part, it was a happy childhood for Helen: she remembers it as being poor, but never deprived. There was always food on the table – often macaroni and cheese casserole. Helen told me that she was eleven years old before she discovered that other folks put meat in their tacos–more Alternate Memories! Helen's sister Annabeth (nee Annie) recalls those years in El Paso.

Setting the scene, Mama[1] had taken us three kids and left Daddy[2] in about February of 1947. She had saved up a thousand dollars [she later told us] from her "household spending money" during the last few years up at the mine. During the war years (1942-1945) there were restrictions on everything, most especially on gasoline and tires. So any sort of travel was exceedingly rare. And everything else was restricted too; plus Daddy was staying in Silver City with Eva a lot of the time, and so Mama really didn't have that much trouble saving money — there was nothing "extraneous" to spend it on!

El Paso, Texas: Right up in the middle of New Mexico, really. *Pero, al primero, El Paso del Norte* – the northern pass through the Franklin mountain chain. It was all part of the enormous territory known as Texas which extended from central Mexico, through all of what we now call New Mexico and most if not all of what we call Texas, and into Colorado (at least), all of which was "owned" by the Spaniards who had viciously taken it from the *Aztecas* and other indigenous peoples who had inhabited that land for centuries. None of which had anything to do with any of the people who came from northern Europe – England, Ireland, Netherlands, Germany.

El Paso. In many ways, a sleepy little town that merely had enormous history and current activity including three major military establishments going on at all times. Very traditional downtown, with major streets edging the central plaza square of about three blocks to a side, with concrete sidewalks converging to the center pool with fountain and live alligators. I thought every town had a central alligator pool.

Two major department stores, where my mother worked developing newspaper ads for one of them; one major radio station, where my mother worked writing and selling ad time. The dentist office on the 2nd or 3rd floor of a building facing the plaza, where I would take the city bus (with a transfer at Five Points) to my frequent dental visits. Alone, and unfazed.

On special occasions Mama would take us across the bridge to go shopping in Juarez. At the market we could get those little balsa-wood boxes of that almost liquid candy called *dulce de leche.* Have never been able to find it since then. And could get those tiny miniature china tea sets – too small really to fit properly with my doll house but cherished nonetheless. And

[1] Helen Elizabeth "Betty" Brand Faust Muller (1913-1979), FGM 74097841.

[2] Jerry Willard Faust II (1912-1966), FGM 78350861.

enormous brightly colored crepe paper flowers, and hand-carved, hand painted wooden trays and bowls – good for wall decorations when you weren't using them to serve food. I never did understand how Mama knew how to find her way from place to place there.

Blistering hot sand everywhere – unmodified sand dunes as vacant lots between build homes in thin gritty layers on the equally blisteringly hot sidewalk; only slightly modifying the nearly-melted asphalt of the streets, where our bike tires left their treads. Not still blistering, but ubiquitous sand inside even the tightest-built home – sifting in everywhere, requiring constant vacuuming to keep furniture and curtains clean; sweeping, dusting, mopping, waxing floors; wiping walls; washing sheets – you get the picture.

And frigidly pinching winds whipping our coats and book bags as we walked the two miles to Austin High School in the winter – desert temps range wildly high in summer and cold in winter. We could have ridden the city buses – catch the one near our house to go to Five Points, wait and transfer to the one to go back toward the school (making a big "V"); this would take just a little bit longer than the direct walk and cost the bus fare but sometimes you just wanted to not walk.

And when a sandstorm was approaching there was virtually nothing you could do to protect yourself. The wind whipped the sand particles into your face and legs and clothing and eyes and ears and mouth – you covered your face as well as you could with whatever you had at hand, but it certainly didn't keep it all out, by a long shot.

We rode our bikes all over our part of the city – probably about 2-5 miles distance from our house, depending on the direction. We rode to friends' houses to visit/play mostly. Sometimes we would ride to the neighborhood grocery store for a couple of things, but usually that would have been a walking trip, with bags to carry. The grocer knew us, so we just told him what Mama wanted us to get and he would get it together for us and "charge it" to her bill. I never knew when she tallied up with him, nor whether that was a big issue for her or not.

But we did have some edgy things we would do on our bikes. There was (still is, I suppose) a very large bank of concrete steps at the front entrance to the high school – they were in at least two or maybe three subsets, of at least 12-15 steps per tier, with one or two flat landings before the next tier of steps. It was something of a chore to walk our bikes up to the top of those stairs, but a major "rush" to come down them, lickety-split!

Similarly, in the opposite direction from the house, there was a large empty lot area (like about ¼ mile long and half that wide), that had a very deep dry gully wash running down the center of it. So riding down to the bottom of that gully and back up all in one swoop was a major accomplishment, especially if you could do it without slipping on the loose gravel and spilling. A fall there was always both painful and embarrassing. And (this is truly shameful) there was a neighbor woman that "we kids" didn't "like" (I have no idea why) and sometime we would actually spend some of our meager allowance to buy a few too-soft tomatoes and get lined up just at the side of her property, then ride in close single-file dropping the tomatoes and squashing them on her sidewalk.

OK, cast of characters here. My brother Jerry one year younger than me, his friend Jimmy, about his age, and sometimes my friend Carolyn (my age), Karen (our age, but less often part of the gang), another kid named Billy (maybe my age or a bit older) and sometimes Sheila (Jerry's age?). {Fast very forward – turns out my cousin Barbara married Billy! I had no idea they even knew each other!}

Well, I'm mixing up stories from two different houses we lived in in El Paso. But this is a decent glimpse of some of the feeling-tone of my "middle childhood" there (ages 11 – 15ish).

Pre-scene: Hanover, NM: I had not been unhappy with life up at the mine prior to moving to El Paso, but as isolated as we were, it could be a bit boring. Did you ever see the place where we lived up on the hill between two of the mines that Daddy supervised? We were associated with a tiny town – really a village – called Hanover, NM, but little or nothing remains of it today. Just over the hill behind us was/is the town of Santa Rita, NM, location of an enormous "open pit" style copper mine.

We had just four frame houses, painted green with white trim, built and placed there by the Phelps-Dodge mining company as residences for the top few officials for the mines. It was Daddy (General Superintendent), Ivan as Bookkeeper, Gary Rickman as Mechanical Engineer, and our Uncle Bob Raines (husband of Mama's sister Nina) as chief electrician. There was a simple two-strand barbed wire fence that enclosed an area that may have been five acres or so — all just bare native scrub brush and wire-stiff grasses. The fence was minimal at best — sort of a "suggestion" to keep wild donkeys from wandering into the area I think. And we were of course *never* to go outside of that fence!

Daddy had pipelines installed to bring mine water over to the houses to use for toilets and gardening, but we couldn't drink it — we had huge bottles of water delivered and placed in a dispensing stand for drinking and cooking. Daddy also had electricity furnished to the houses by way of a generator that was located near the houses, and it was always getting hit by lightning in the storms (we were at about 7000 feet altitude.) And then of course they had laid sewer lines to carry all the waste water away from the houses. That was easy — we were perched on the side of a hill that extended a mile or so down to the little town of Hanover, NM — no problem with drainage!

There was, I hope you can see, absolutely nothing to do there. In the mornings, we would have breakfast, and Mama would send us out "to play". She would call us in to get a drink of water every now and then, and call us in for lunch, and make us take a nap in the afternoon and then back out to play till dinner time. I have no idea how we filled our time. I felt terminally bored the entire time.

There were a few other kids there — I guess that's how we spent our time. The Rickmans had a boy about Jerry's age; and Aunt Nina had several kids — first Bob who was maybe 1-2 years younger than Jerry, then Alan a year or so after that, then a daughter Jodie, and then a 4th kid who I don't remember.

Anyway, one day there was some great excitement! Somebody (probably either our cousin Bob or the Rickman kid) came excitedly to tell us that they had found a swimming hole that we could go get in and cool off! Wow! None of us had ever known of such a thing around there, so we hurried off with the "messenger" to see what this marvelous pastime would look like.

Uh-oh! It was OTF — Outside The Fence! But — heck, that fence was totally simple to get through — just two little strands of barbed wire, one 18" and the other 3 feet off the ground, strung along the perimeter of our enclosure on little twig-like branches from nearby scrub-pines — so we did it. And there, just a little way down the hill was indeed this sort of pond of water! So we probably took off our shoes, but likely nothing more, and waded in to it. It was sort of murky, but nothing around there was particularly "nice", so that didn't bother us any.

Well, we were having a lovely time playing around there, when one or more of the mothers must have missed us, and they came looking for us. (There's always a downside to any time you're having fun, right?) They were *furious* at us! *Way* more than seemed reasonable, even in view of the fact that we had gone Outside The Fence. We all got hauled home hastily and bathed and fussed over something fierce. It was all quite beyond anything that made sense to us.

It was only years later that I learned that the lovely “swimming hole" that we were frolicking away in was in fact the cesspool where all of the raw, totally untreated sewage for all four houses drained to!

To El Paso: But now, it is 1947, and we were off to El Paso. Mama took us to El Paso because she had been born there and that is where her mother[3] was, and where she had gone to school, etc. Among her acquaintances was a woman named Mary Shacklette[4] who was a realtor, and apparently Mama had been in communication with Mary for some time about all of this. Housing was extremely tight, and it was definitely a sellers’ market, but Mama’s cash availability for the down payment made a substantial difference in the search. So Mary found a house for us and got it all signed, sealed and delivered, and we were ready to move.

Mama packed us up in her little blue Plymouth coupe (it must have been jam-packed!) and soon we were in our new home. I have no idea how she managed furnishing it, but she did — we were not in a bare space or any such thing.

It was a real adobe house, with those thick walls — 2 bedrooms, 1 bath, living room, kitchen — and a front porch that we kids treated like our very own space!

So what does a newly-divorced woman do, who has three children to feed and support, and absolutely zero work experience? Her college degree held very little value when contrasted with the male war vets looking for jobs.

Well, she was quite adept at handling words, coming from a family full of women writers. Mama’s mother, my grandmother “Aunt” Anna Brand was a well-known published author of short stories and novels, including her Pulizter Prize-nominated “I Want You Myself” (1937). And Aunt Anna also grew up with a woman writer for a mother — my great grandmother Elizabeth Hendrix was an active writer who had to publish her work under a male-sounding name due to editors’ failure to publish works from women writers. She wrote short stories and a lot of free-lance general interest items for newspapers.

One of the stories that I finally extracted from Aunt Anna was regarding a six-month assignment that her mother had accepted to go live with an Indian tribe (Crees possibly) somewhere up around the Great Lakes. She took her two little girls with her, and they lived with the people in their homes (tents? Tipis?) and she wrote about their daily life and customs. They were all given Indian names, but she never would give me any details.

Another story took place during the Mexican Revolution (1910-1924). She got an assignment to go interview Pancho Villa — on his side of the river! So she went out after dark, on the appointed night, and was met by Villa’s guys with a little raft to take her over to the Mexican side of the river; they even chivalrously had a little box there for her to sit on as they made the crossing. There was active gunfire going on, so they had to be very quiet in making the crossing. When they got to the other side, as she stood up to step to land, there was a shell burst nearby and she could see the writing on the box she had been sitting on — Dynamite!

And Aunt Anna’s sister, Elizabeth’s other daughter, my mother’s Aunt Helen (Lopez), was also a writer — short stories and magazine articles e.g., for Woman’s Home Companion. And my

[3] Anna Brand, author of “*Thunder Before Seven*”

[4] Mary *Hudnall* Shacklette (1898-1979), FGM 145548457

mother's own sister Nina (Raines) also was a writer, although I'm not sure how well published she was. But there was always a lot of talk about writing, publishing, language, word-choice, etc in all the family.

While still in New Mexico ("up at the mine") during the war, Mama would write many entries in these "25-words-or-less" contests. In these events, the sponsoring agency would identify the particular item that they wanted the contestants to write about, and in "25 words or less" tell why that product was superior in some way. The sponsor would award perhaps one grand prize, 2 or 3 runner-up prizes and 5-10 honorable mentions, with monetary amounts of maybe $100 to $500, $20-$40, and $1-$10 respectively. These were usually nation-wide and heavily entered, and the sponsors would then use all these contest entries to develop their own advertising materials.

Mama was quite good at these things, and she won many prizes. One such prize was the diamond ring that she paired up with some other stones to provide the rings she gave to Helen and to me for our high school graduations. There was another contest in which the contestants were to choose between two different products as the target of their entry, and the top prize in each group would be the award of that appliance.

The two appliances (I think the sponsor was General Electric) were an electric stove and a refrigerator. So Mama worked on it a bit and fired off what she thought was a really good entry, focused on the electric stove. And then, just after she mailed it off, she though "Oh no! I don't want that! I *need* a new refrigerator!" So she really sat down and worked up a new entry, for a fridge, and sure enough, she won it! She won the first-place prize in that national contest, from that totally isolated perch on the side of a hill in New Mexico.

Armed with these results as her portfolio, she applied for work in various advertising situations, and was hired at the major department store in downtown El Paso. And later she moved over to writing ads for a radio station, and then further moved into selling the ad time for the station (where with her commissions she made considerably more than the salaries at the other two positions.)

[Editor's inquiry: "During my early years of marriage to Helen, she would often tell the story of growing up poor in El Paso, and how she was hit by a car at about age 5, and that it left her ear "hanging by a thread" according to her mother. Then one time Mama came to visit, Helen reminded her of this story, and Mama snorted, "Hanging by a thread? Ha! You had a little tear on your ear!" What could be the story behind the story?" Annabeth responds:]

Our house in El Paso that Mama found with the help of Mary Shacklette was located on Altura Boulevard, a moderately busy street that intersected with Copia Street, a fairly major street a couple of blocks down the way. There were several other families with kids on our block — I can think of 5 right now — but I cannot think of who it was that Helen liked to go play with on the other side of the street. Anyway, it was our job (Jerry and me) to be available to take Helen safely across whenever she wanted to go over there or to come home.

I'm sure you can hear it now — us grousing at having to be around to take her across when she wanted to go play with her friend; and then listen for her to call us when she was over there, ready to come home.

Daddy was (as I imagine you have heard in other contexts) exceedingly uncommunicative with us or with Mama, and he always wanted to be treated like royalty whenever he did have anything to do with us. Once in a while he would show up, unannounced of course, and throw everyone (i.e., Mama) into a tizzy. She was always afraid that he would do something to take

us away from her — I have no idea whether that was a realistic fear or not, but it was constantly in her mind.

Jerry was always glad to see Daddy when he would come, I was always irritated at his intrusion into what my day was, and quite distant toward him. But Helen was totally gaga when he would be there. (I was 10-11-12 years old at that time, Jerry was 9-10-11, and Helen was barely out of babyhood, 3-4-5.)

So on this one day, Daddy showed up, and the standard commotion ensued, and everybody forgot that Helen was across the street at her friend's house. When she realized what was happening, she of course started calling for someone to come help her across the street, but nobody heard her at all — probably all in the house by then or some such. So after waiting what must have felt like twenty years to her, she just decided to try it by herself.

Well, there were cars parked along the side of the street, and a pretty constant level of traffic both directions, with no crosswalk for a couple of blocks either direction. So, sure enough, she stepped out, way too small for drivers to see her as she came from the yard to the street, and someone did in fact hit her. The driver stopped and was horrified, and everyone came rushing out of the house, and there really *was* commotion then!

Helen was crying, the driver was apologizing, Mama was mad at Jerry and me, and Daddy was trying to make it all Mama's fault any way he could. Oh, and I imagine there was police presence for a while too.

Helen's ear really was hurt and bleeding where her head had hit the pavement, and I guess it was a trip to the ER or doctor's office — probably the latter. We did have a very reliable family doctor, which was really good! I don't remember who went on the emergency run, but I'm pretty sure Jerry and I stayed back at the house. When everybody was back, Helen was indeed the queen of the day, and Daddy went home (maybe a 3 hour drive back to the mine) and everyone was quite happy to call it a day.

As to any after-the-fact discussion of the severity of the injury — I think it was severe enough to have warranted the care and attention that it got — seems to me she had stitches that had to be removed after the passage of time. And you know how stories get revised to suit the current time and attitude in future re-tellings! And you certainly know the personalities of Mama and Helen!

I loved our little house on Altura in El Paso. Those big thick adobe walls kept the house really cool in the summer time (when we kids were home more than during school-time). And the walls being so thick, they provided really wide window-sill space, which was wonderful for propping up a book and reading in comfort, or storing whatever items you might be playing with, to keep them out of the way of the other kids.

One thing that we all got a kick out of was using the open window as a conduit for our cat Butchie to go in and out. We had never heard of such a thing as a doggy-door of course, so we just thought we had invented the best thing since sliced bread. Jerry was the most effective at it — he would call Butchie from wherever he was in the other rooms of the house, and cajole him to jump through the window to get outside. And then it would take some work, but Jerry would get him to come on back through the window to come inside again (usually bribed with a bit of cat food probably!)

But the crowning glory (to Jerry) and the horrendous travesty (to me) and the everlasting delight (to Helen) was the day that Jerry was "working" Butchie back & forth through the window, to the point that the cat really seemed to be getting into it himself, and so the grand finale was set:

Butchie was inside the house, Jerry was at the window calling him to come and jump, and Butchie did in fact come RUNNING— and Jerry quickly slammed the window shut and Butchie hit it head on in mid flight, and Jerry was absolutely delighted. I of course was horrified. Butchie was a bit dazed but none the worse for the experience.

Money was tight, no question, and Mama was exceedingly careful in how she parsed out our (I guess meager) income to cover our expenses.

Mama often qualified to work as a substitute teacher, which she could easily accommodate when she was working a job that did not require daily presence at a desk somewhere. She did this both in New Mexico and in El Paso.

In both school systems, it was illegal for the Mexican-American students to speak Spanish anywhere on the school grounds, both to encourage their growth in using English, and to forestall problems potentially hatched if the students felt they would not be overheard or understood.

One time Mama told the story of a teaching day she was doing, when a group of guys who felt like they were pretty hot stuff were in the back of the room, talking in Spanish. She kept right on with what she was saying to the class, then turned to the guys and in Spanish she corrected their Spanish, told them to quit it, and to pay attention or she would send them to the Principal's office; and then continued with her lesson to the class. They were "struck dumb" by all of that and did indeed at least settle down and not disturb the class any more.

Regarding Mama working at El Paso radio station KEPO, it was when she wanted to move to the much more lucrative position of sales rep for the station, leaving the little salaried position, that she had to agree to work for commission alone before they would allow her to make the switch. (They were quite surprised that she not only was able to do the job, she thoroughly excelled in it!) They finally did grant her the base pay that the male sales reps got, plus her commissions that she earned

From an early age, Mama made certain that I knew what our family finances were and how they were handled, and how she made financial decisions as they came up. But we always had food in the house, we were well clothed and had our health taken care of. There were the annual seasons of household panic as Mama would struggle to collect all the beginning-of-school-year necessities such as new shoes, school clothes, and classroom supplies for three kids, but I have no doubt that the same thing was going on in the homes of 90% of our classmates.

Looking back on it, I am thoroughly amazed that Mama was as able to provide for us as she was. It was after all, just after WWII; the GIs were all coming home and taking jobs, and a (gasp!) woman, who was (double gasp!) unmarried, was WAY down the list of interesting potential employees for most establishments. Daddy was supposed to pay a certain amount each month in child support, but many months he did not do it, or did not do it on time, so whatever Mama was making was not enough to cover our total expenses. On several occasions she had to call the court where the divorce was granted, and have the judge take some sort of action (usually informal, sometimes formal) to get the payments coming again.

Mama was often commenting on our financial limitations, so I guess that would lend a sense of being "poor" (especially to Helen being such a little kid), but that is not how I tended to think of it. I just took all of that as reasonable cautions on family behaviors.

Mama's real "coup" came when she was desperately trying to find a bigger house, so all three of us kids would not have to be in the same bedroom. There was a lot of new-home construction happening in the late 40s/early 50s, but the problem was getting the financing. A great deal of the housing being built was financed through the GI Bill. Well that cut her out of the whole thing

from the get-go. She (of course) had not served in any of the armed forces, and Daddy had had a strategic exemption from military service due to his position at the mines — that was considered "necessary war materiel".

During this time since the divorce, Mama began to do a little bit of dating. And then there was this one guy who seemed to be getting pretty serious with her and vice versa. He seemed to be "older' than her, but heck — they were all "old" people, right? So, in time, they were in fact married, in the Presbyterian Church in the area called Five Points. And soon after that, Mama said that she had found a new house for us, with 3 bedrooms and a lot more space than this one we had been living in for 3-4 years now. It was located a couple of miles away from this first one, just outside the south gate of Fort Bliss, on Wainwright Street.

So we moved to our brand-spanking-new home in the summer of 1950 or '51. But just about the time we moved in, Mama and her new husband got a divorce! I was quite taken aback, but they said they had just discovered that they didn't really care for one another like they thought they would; and they were parting as good friends. It all seemed weird to me, but I was mostly involved with just trying to make my own way through life.

In a strange little way, there seemed to be a general attitude of irritation or non-acceptance toward us from our new neighbors that I had not felt in the old neighborhood. When I did get around to mentioning it to Mama, she said that it might be due to her being (again) a single woman, and (that being the early 50s of course) put her terribly at odds with the general expectations for a "proper family".

It was only years later that someone pointed out to me that that man Mama had married was doing us all a huge favor. He was not planning to utilize his GI Bill loan feature, so he agreed to marry Mama in order for her to use that means to buy this house that she wanted us to have, and then just be divorced and both go on their separate ways. And the antagonism that we felt from the neighborhood was them questioning how she could have gotten this house that was in this totally GI-Bill-financed subdivision!

That man's name was James Edward Taylor, and he went by the nickname of his initials — JET. Such a generous act JET did for us.

BiA2 notes re "Mama": **Helen Elizabeth "Betty" Brand** was born on 22 Mar 1913 in EL Paso, El Paso Co, TX. Betty attended public schools in El Paso, and graduated about Jun 1935 from Texas College of Mines (later UTEP), El Paso, TX (BA in Liberal Arts). Betty really wanted to go to Law School, but this was the Depression era; no money. She was deeply disappointed she was not able to. Following her graduation from college and a brief teaching career, Betty married Jerry Faust II, a mining engineer, and lived in NM for eight years. She returned to El Paso in 1946, was active in community affairs, and was a much sought-after public speaker. She supported her family with a career in advertising, as a protégé of the late Mary Shacklette in real estate and in banking, in El Paso and later in Southern California (where she lived with her second husband, Art Muller).

When Betty left the mine in 1947, she went to work for KEPO radio station in El Paso, writing the segues for radio announcers at a time when it was difficult for anyone to get a job, let alone a woman. She convinced them by saying she would work on commission only. Although she finally moved to Tucson for health reasons, El Paso remained the family home. She succumbed to a long battle with emphysema and died on 22 Feb 1978 in Tucson, AZ. A quiet memorial service was held in Tucson for Betty on 26 Feb 1979.

BiA2 notes re "Daddy": **Jerry Williard Faust Jr.** was born on 8 Jun 1912 in Ft. Bliss, El Paso, TX. He graduated about Jun 1934 from Texas School of Mines, El Paso, TX (Mining Engineering). Jerry did some graduate work at Texas Western also, but did not receive a graduate degree. Then off to work at Terlingua, Mexico for 2-3 years, then got the job in Silver City with same company (Illinois Zinc) that he stayed with for his mining career. Quickly moved up in management, to general manager of all three mines Illinois Zinc had in that area. Jerry spoke Spanish fluently. He lived by, "I'll never ask a man to do something I wouldn't do myself," which is critical in mining safety.

In July 1966, Jerry was thrown from a horse on the Faust ranch near Glenwood, NM, and hit his head on a rock. He was driven first to Silver City, then the several hundred miles to a hospital in El Paso, El Paso Co, TX. He died there the next day on 15 Jul 1966 and was buried in Memory Lane, Silver City, NM.

Jerry was the person after whom the filmmakers modeled their anti-hero in "*Salt of the Earth*" (1953), even to the point of his turning his pipe upside down when it was raining. This movie, filmed at his mine area, was about the labor and management strife, and is now considered a forerunner of women's rights. He was furious about it being filmed there and the mine's directors were able to prevent its being distributed for money; it could only be shown in non-commercial settings when no fees are collected. The movie was considered for remake in 2003. Jerry married Helen Elizabeth "Betty" Brand on 10 Sep 1935 in EL Paso, El Paso Co, TX; they were divorced in early 1947.

I am not sure that the divorce was final when we moved to El Paso — I'm guessing that is when Mary had the house ready for us to come. It seems to me that the divorce finalization happened some piece of time later. But it does seem to me that each time the money was late coming from Daddy, Mama went through some period of angst, having to weigh the matter of contacting the court, and having it be in NM (different state from where we were living).

Mama and Daddy grew up just a block apart from one another — (my mother's mother) Aunt Anna & Uncle Harry's house on (I believe) 3014 Clifton Street (now called Avenue, according to Google Maps!), and (my father's sister) Aunt Margaret and (her second husband)… Drake's (and later my cousin Barbara)'s house in the same 3000 block on Hueco Street (also now called Avenue) the next street over. At least I have that image in mind, of him being that close to her in those years. Perhaps that house had been owned by their mother Minnie Faust after the death of their father Jerry?

In any case, they basically went to school together all through both high school and college, with Mama basically one year behind him all the way. I know she never had any other boyfriend than him — I suspect the converse is not true. (Smiles). After Daddy graduated and took his job in Terlingua, Mama was still finishing up her work at the College of Mines (as it was still called then). And she was firmly planning to be married when she did finish — so the preparations were in full swing. She told me about collecting her "trousseau" — and she of course had to explain that to me. I thought the whole thing was pretty silly, even as a child, when there did not seem to be any issue with the marriage lasting.

But (predictably?) while there in Terlingua as a very eligible bachelor, Daddy got involved with a "redheaded schoolteacher" — I never knew her name. Anyway, Daddy said he wanted out of the "understanding" with Mama, Mama was devastated and got rid of all of her carefully assembled trousseau (but kept the cedar chest she accumulated things in); but they reconciled somehow, and were married, and Mama moved to Terlingua. They were married on September

11, 1935 and I was born on October 6, 1936. It would be easy to believe that the marriage had been forced due to being pregnant with me, but clearly that is not so.

And then Jerry was born in December 1937, just 14 months after me. Mama said she had not known that she could get pregnant while still nursing (me). I remember one story that Mama would tell about that period of time. She would drive back to El Paso for doctor's visits etc, on this incredibly difficult, narrow, winding mountainous road from the Big Ben area of Texas to El Paso, some …. miles. And one time, there was a fast-moving truck that simply did not move over as she and it came around the same turn, and it hit her head-on. The impact pushed the engine of the car back into her passenger area "into her lap" is how she described it. She was scared to death of course, both for herself and for the baby she was carrying (Jerry). I never heard how the scene was resolved, but clearly, she and Jerry both survived it just fine.

Mama and Daddy both spoke fluent Spanish — that's how they would talk about things when they didn't want us kids to know what they were saying!

I also have one personal memory from that time (!). There were so many bugs in the whole area (especially scorpions) that my crib was totally screened in — including a hinged top for the crib. And I remember feeling terribly hemmed in by that ***heavy*** top to the crib, which (of course) I wanted to get rid of and get out of the crib. I just thought it was so unfair of them to make that thing so heavy that I couldn't handle it myself!

They moved to Silver City in 1938 or 39, and stayed in that little house for a very short time — maybe no more than a year. I remember the occasion when they took a photo of me sitting on the (very rough) concrete step that led up to the street from the house. Besides thinking it was rather inconsiderate of them to ask me to sit my bare legs on that rough cement, I ***really*** thought it was silly —or even "dumb" -- of them to tell me to hold my doll down in front of my legs instead of the way everybody *knows* you're supposed to hold it — like a real baby. And of course the photo came out quite darling.

I don't remember the actual move to the house on the hill — "at the mine" -- (so I guess I was still pretty young), but I do remember some time later making a conscious effort to envision what the physical space layout was (rather than simply memorizing the pathway to get from the kitchen to the dining room, to turn left to the hall, to turn left again to get to our bedroom). I could possibly have been about 4 or 5 at that time. So the move to the mine could have been in 1939 or 40 maybe?

And, separately, regarding Daddy's being thrown from his horse, I have a couple of comments. We could add the comment "sustained a massive head injury"; and consider how he might possibly have survived had they been any where near decent medical facilities, precluding those terrible, long, bumpy, multi-stage trips to get to the hospital a hundred or more miles away in El Paso.

One other item regarding Daddy's death. I *think* that it was one more day, not just the very next day after the accident that he died. I had to come from Jackson to get there, on no notice at all of course, so plane flights were bizarre, and I did get there just shortly before he actually died. It seems to me that he had been in the hospital over night by the time I got there, But I could be mistaken — that was a pretty rough time of course.

Oh my goodness! Wait! Are you certain that he was in El Paso in the hospital? Do you have some sort of documentation about it? Because all of a sudden, I think it was Silver City! I think that Eva drove him down that horrible bumpy road just to get to the local airstrip, and someone

there flew him to Silver to avoid such a long bumpy ride in the back of the station wagon! (He had a huge gaping wound in his head.) And my trip was complicated by having to take two flights, getting to El Paso, and then trying to get to Silver City somehow. Because I have a sudden little memory of a lot of confusion about getting me from the airport to Silver City. I was so befuddled that I didn't even think of renting a car. Maybe Billy or someone did come pick me up. I really do not remember what was the actual case. Anyway, I arrived there much later than anyone else.

But I know that Eva set his funeral at the Episcopal church, and all of us were seated in the balcony up behind the rest of the congregation so I couldn't see hardly anything of it. Somehow I remember heavy curtains in the area. Later I asked her why she had set it there, and she said she thought that would make me/us feel more at ease or something. I do know that I was quite moved by the *huge* turnout for the funeral, and how truly he seemed to be loved (or at least respected) and appreciated by so many different people. The cemetery where he was buried is some distance out from Silver City, and the enormous line of cars in the procession snaked around those hilly roads for (it seemed) miles in length.

And, regarding the "Salt of the Earth" — the movie was initially intended to be used as union-organizing tool, and it still is being used as a grass-roots political organizing element. The mining company sued the movie producers on Daddy's behalf, charging Libel; they won that partial ruling granting no commercial showing of the movie.

Google tells us: Other participants who made the film and were blacklisted by the Hollywood studios include Paul Jarrico and Will Geer:

> **Release date**: March 14, 1954 (New York City)
> **Directed by**: Herbert J. Biberman
> **Produced by**: Paul Jarrico
> **Music by**: Sol Kaplan

(I'm guessing Will Geer played the role of "Daddy")

[Editor's inquiry: Was Helen baptized?]

Good question! As far as I know, there was no baptism for any of us. But I could be totally mistaken on this matter.

That was the short answer. The longer answer gets into the wider "religious history" factor that I alluded to earlier.

Part 1: grandparents and parents

First, some background on grandparents and parents:

"Aunt Anna" was Mama's mother, Anna Brand – she insisted that her grandkids call her "Aunt Anna" rather than Grandma. She wrote two pretty major novels, "*Thunder Before Seven*" and "*I Want You Myself*" — I think the former is the one which was nominated for the Pulitzer Prize. She also wrote many short stories and novellas, published in women's magazines and the like.

And "Uncle Harry" (H.B. Willis), her second husband, was the only grandfather that we kids knew. He was a dear gentle person, very refined in his behavior patterns, from upstate New York. He married Aunt Anna after the apparent death (long-term disappearance) of Mama's father Albert Brand, just when I imagine Aunt Anna was at the height of her social-writer's status in El Paso. They must have been quite the toast of the town.

And Aunt Anna was his third wife! The first one was Jane Knickerbocker, yes of that family in new York, and many of the finer items of artwork and household furnishings came to us as a result of that marriage. That ended in divorce, and he married a sweet woman artist. She died

and I think he left New York after that to just get into a different milieu. He worked with the border patrol and US Customs Agency in El Paso until his retirement.

Here are the few things that I know about Mama's father Albert Brand:

The family lived in the "Big Bend" area of Texas before moving to El Paso, somewhere around 1918–1921. Anyway, I found that family, with two little girls named Helen and Nina listed in the 1920 Census, both in Big Bend and in El Paso. And this is consistent with Aunt Anna writing that book set in "pioneer Texas" days, with the Texas Cabin model as a visual prop to aid in her writing.

Mama would speak longingly of cherished mornings when she would play tennis on the vacant lot beside the house in El Paso with her dad. She said he would travel a *lot*, back & forth to China, with his sister, as a missionary. Every phrase of that sentence is suspect to me. There are in fact a fairly large number of very nice clearly Chinese items in our family heritage, evidently results of those trips. Then (I can't guess the date here) he just did not return from one of those trips. Numerous attempts to contact him were unsuccessful, so after 7 years, Aunt Anna had papers drawn up to declare him dead. I'm guessing she felt she had to do that in order to marry Harry.

And one day Mama came home from college classes at Texas Western, to find her father standing in the living room arguing loudly with her mother! Figuring backwards, I would guess this must have been about 1929-1931, possibly earlier. Anyway, Aunt Anna *ordered* Mama to go to her room, which she did, and she never saw her father again.

She did however see some letters from him to Aunt Anna, possibly after Aunt Anna died, and those letters had a return address in the Philippines. He had evidently simply stopped and created a new life , with a wife and children there, I have no idea about names or anything else.[5]

I *suspect* that Aunt Anna and Aunt Helen. and therefore possibly their mother Elizabeth Hendrix, were Catholic, at least nominally. This is based on the merest shreds of indication, which may or may not have any reality or connectivity. Additional "Item" regarding the possibility that Aunt Anna et al were in some degree Catholic: Aunt Anna always made a big deal about being "from Virginia" — this was a "be all and end all" for her in some way, indicating social status at least, and possibly previous wealth. And of course there is/was the Land Grant from King George.

Item — when I was about 12, Mama and Aunt Anna got into one of their squabbling matches which went on for an extended period of time (I don't know — maybe days maybe weeks intermittently). The topic (or at least *a* topic) was regarding Aunt Anna's declaration that she was going to take "instructions". Mama was angry about that, saying "Why? You already are one!" When I asked what sort of instructions this was all about, Mama said it was for "the church". Nothing more. I'm guessing she did the classes, by then as much out of stubborn defiance as any driving interest in the content or spiritual guidance, but of course, she never transmitted anything of those natures to me, so I don't know.

[5] Editor's note: Helen would tell me the story of when she was living as an adult with Mama and one day a letter came addressed to Mama with return address from a military rank like a PFC Brand, address in the Philippines. Helen said Mama took a look at at and threw it away, did not even open it or read it.

Item — Aunt Helen — sister to Aunt Anna, therefore my great aunt — was married to a Mexican man. This signaled to me that he ("Uncle Freddy") was probably Catholic, there being an exceedingly high correlation between Mexican heritage and being Catholic.

Item — I knew somewhere along the line that Aunt Nina — Mama's sister — was Catholic, as was her husband Uncle Bob (Raines) — all of which I considered to be strangely anachronistic — how could they still cling to such outmoded stuff as all that — although I had absolutely zero knowledge, much less understanding of what that might entail. And what an interesting coincidence, that they both happened to still be hanging onto that!

I*tem* — And then they (Aunt Nina and Uncle Bob) kept on having babies — they had *four* — which seemed quite beyond the pale for me! (Not a judgmental bone in my body, you know!)

Item — when we were still living "up at the mine", I remember one day Mama telling me about an experience she had. I don't know if this had just happened, or if it was something that had happened some time earlier and she had said something to me about it as a means of working it all out in her own mind as to just what it was that had taken place. I guess I was somewhere around 10-11 at this time.

She said she had "found" an old Catholic book (she may have given it a proper name such as a Manual of Rarely Used Rites or some such, but that is what the book consisted of. She emphasized that it was a book that was supposed to *only* be used by a Priest. What did she know about such a thing, and how could she say it so casually?

She was reading all these various rituals, and the instructions on how to conduct them such as (I imagine) Blessing of a new home, etc, when she came across a ritual for exorcism. Well! This was right up her alley, given her proclivity toward the occult, the nefarious, the "outre" of any sort.

She read the ritual, and decided to see if she could do it herself! She went outside, took a stick and drew a circle in the dirt as the book had described, and she did all the things that were listed — which she may have told me but I have no memory about — and then when she had completed all of the preparatory elements, she took a deep breath, and stood in the center of the circle and said the "magic" words of the ritual. She was scared to death! She insists that she saw smoke or fumes coming up out of the earth and she could detect the odor of burning sulphur!

She *jumped* out of the circle area, took her stick and scratched the circle away and said over and over "I'm sorry! I'm sorry! I didn't mean to do it!", and she declares that she destroyed the book of rituals.

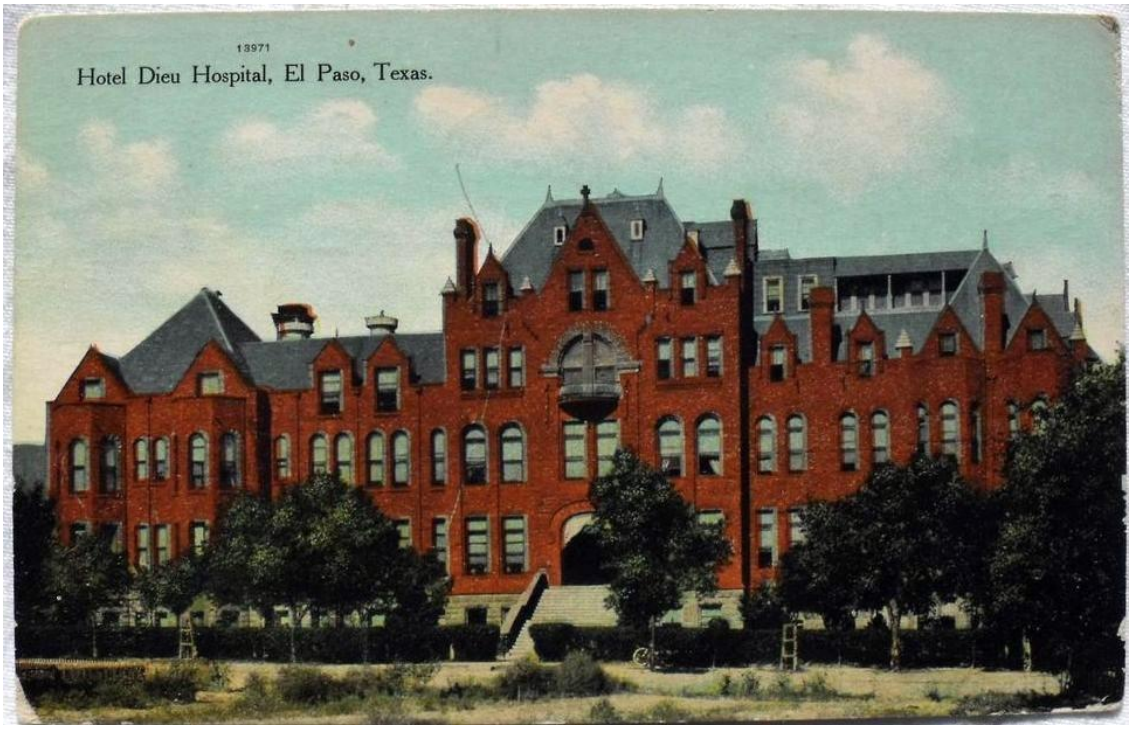
Part 2: Jerry, Helen & me — siblings

Item — I was born at a Catholic hospital: Hotel Dieu Hospital, in El Paso, Texas, on October 6, 1936. I see now that that was in its relative infancy, or at least youth, having been established in 1893. It is quite eye-opening, to begin to recognize just how close to the early frontier-busting days that was! My brother Jerry, just one year later, was also born there, I imagine. In later years, I had wondered why my mother had chosen this clearly Catholic-based hospital to go to for our births, but now I see that it was quite possibly the only hospital in the region, or if not the only one, certainly the premiere one.

The grand exterior was a deliberate replication of the original hospital of its name, in Paris, France. Initially founded in 659 AD, the current building there dates to 1877, only about 20 years prior to this one. The Daughters of Charity who had it built certainly did draw upon some serious backing to accomplish that magnitude of an establishment! I assume that the interior was equal to the exterior in quality, though nothing I have read has discussed that aspect. But the fact that

it was acclaimed for giving such excellent care to the patients, and that it was the major Nursing School for many miles in any direction, implies that it was as well-appointed inside as out.

My parents were not living in El Paso at the time of my birth, but their families were still there, and it was a "given" that that is where Mama would be going to give birth to both babies. When we did move back to El Paso, in my "middle youth", I became accustomed to the sight of this magnificent edifice that housed the place of my birth. I did not realize how deeply that image had imprinted itself in my brain as "the essence of hospital" until I was faced with giving birth to my own two children years later in Boulder Colorado, and saw this highly ordinary looking place that I was destined to go to. It felt cosmically inferior.



And, as is seen in some of the comments listed later, this edifice was indeed gradually torn down and replaced with newer, "modern" space as technology advanced through the years; and finally was fully demolished and closed permanently. I am still looking to find where any medical records from that closure went to.

Item — when we had moved to El Paso, I was quite aware that *everybody* seemed to be understanding of and presumably part of, some sort of church or another. I felt totally in the dark — quite "at sea", with no semblance of an oar or a rudder. After a while, my cousin Barbara (daughter of Daddy's sister Aunt Margaret) invited me to go to her church with her— the First Methodist Church.

I went, purely for the evening activities — dinner in the church basement, evening service upstairs in the sanctuary, and then recreation again downstairs. I was thoroughly happy with such an accepting, enfolding environment. After a bit more time, I began to go to the Sunday morning services and regular Sunday School classes. I may have taken Helen with me too — not sure. But I don't think Jerry came much if at all.

So one Easter, I decided to join the church. And they asked if I had been Baptized! So I asked Mama, and she said yes I had, so I didn't need to do this. Well, I was fully into my time of total

rebellion against anything that she would say to me, so I rejected what she said, and I was Baptized at the age of 13 or so in the Methodist Church.

I have not checked any records in El Paso. This also carries the question of whether Jerry was baptized as a baby. I do not remember any baptism event for Helen in New Mexico.

Oh, and Confirmation? That was a term that I *never* heard, until I was an active member in the Episcopal church in the 70s in Atlanta!

Item — When we were in Manhattan Beach — 1952-54 — I saw this sweet little church that we passed on the way to school every day. It just looked so very iconic "old English countryside" type church, and it really piqued my curiosity. So one Sunday I just got up and went there. It was (is) an Episcopal church, which I had seldom if ever heard of, and certainly knew nothing about. But somehow I just liked it, learned the service procedure, attended a couple of Sunday School classes, etc. And one day I successfully got Mama to come to church with me!!

I was astounded — she knew all of the procedure of the service – like all the wording in the long passages that everyone said in unison; and when to stand, kneel, etc – even without me telling her! And when we got home, all she asked me was "what made me want to go to that church?" All I could say was "I don't know — I just liked it." She didn't have anything more to say on the topic.

Part 3: Later Teen years — Mama and Art's "religious" activities

Item — Art, and especially his father, held what seemed to me to be really fringe-like beliefs and inclinations. Mama and Art attended a series of "churches" that were varyingly non-Christian or used Christianity as a framework on which to base their other beliefs. These were variations on a prosperity gospel view of religion, and one even bordered on witchcraft in my opinion. One in which both the name of the religion and the name of the deity were the same "The Great "I AM"." (It was verboten to wear anything red or black — those were *evil* colors, and many other such restrictions.)

Part 4: Young adulthood — UCLA & Boulder, CO

I did not attend any sort of church for several years. When I got to UCLA there was a Methodist church near the campus that I attended, and that is where Dick Johnson and I were married. (We held our reception in the back yard of the place where I was living in Santa Monica.)

When we moved to Boulder, we did a considered selection of a church to attend. Dick had been raised in a fully practicing Lutheran family, to the point that several people had mentioned the hope or possibility of him becoming a priest in that faith. I of course had this checkered background that had very little in the way of substance or tradition. So we visited a number of churches and settled on the First Congregational Church of Boulder, where we both liked the overall tone (religiously and publicly). While we were there, the church's national body completed one of the many protestant mergers, this one with the Evangelical United Brethren church to become the United Church of Christ, commonly known as the UCC.

While there, we became involved in our first forays into racial cooperation, and this is the beginning point for my "Road to Tougaloo" story later.

Part 5: Tougaloo Mississippi

Jackson, Mississippi was an avowed battlefield — there was no neutral ground. This proved particularly difficult for a young white "northern" family. (Anyone not *southern* was by definition "northern". They had no concept of "western".)

White churches were uniformly unwelcoming of us, some to the point of potential danger upon trying to attend services. Black churches were deeply divided — some were grudgingly accepting of us in spite of our obvious unfamiliarity with the practices and mores of the church in general, and others frankly unwelcoming — we brought conflict and discord into their midst, just by our very presence, and they had quite enough of that in the rest of their week so they fiercely guarded their safe time on Sundays. So there was precious little of spiritual relief or guidance for us as adults, and absolutely nothing available to the white children of the "carpetbaggers" who had streamed into Mississippi in the mid 60s.

There were however, enough of "us" that we could form a pretty coherent group for joint worship services, which we began to do on a pretty regular basis. There were the white faculty members at Tougaloo, some from Jackson State College, and some stalwart white residents of Jackson who were long term resisters of the suffocating dominance of segregation. We called ourselves the Ecumenical Church of Reconciliation — ECR. In fact, there were several members of our group who were ordained clergy in their own religious denomination, making it an exceedingly rich experience all the way around.

I took it upon myself to write up a "constitution" for us, which would establish us as sort of a battlefield church, and circulated it to the home denomination offices of the various ordained ones in our group, asking for us to be considered "official" in their sights such that if we ever had the funds to pay for one of these ordained ones to be our paid leader, they could claim the time as part of their official time in office. We received that acceptance from the Methodists, the American Baptists and the UCC!

Part 6: Atlanta

When I moved to Atlanta, one of our ECR members (Jane) told me of an Episcopal church in Atlanta where they had a new rector (Tom Bowers), and he was getting some pretty awesome reviews. I have no idea how she got such information, there in Jackson, but, to make a long story a bit shorter, that is where I went, and have remained for lo these many years! *[To the Editor: There will be one little story still to come, that I call my "Jonah story" which can fit right here.]*

Part 7: Spiritual life

Please note that all of this "religious" story is purely surface information. The inner spiritual path is exceedingly more involved, and will be told (if ever) at a much later date. There are so many other stories to be written first!